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“A Life of Accompaniment”

Service and Justice

In 1982, a month after their wedding, Mark and Linda Jacobson moved to Kenya. Three years later they accepted a call with the Lutheran Church in America, a predecessor church of the ELCA, to serve as community health workers with the Arusha Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT). Little did they know that they would become the ELCA's longest-serving active mission personnel, with 38 years of service.

“Mark and Linda Jacobson are the embodiment of a faithful servant of Christ,” said Rafael Malpica Padilla, ELCA executive director for Service and Justice. “Their whole life has been a life of accompaniment.” *Mission Support, which funds ELCA mission personnel, makes the Jacobsons' work possible.*

In the beginning, Mark, a doctor, supported Maasai community health workers in six small primary-care clinics. He quickly concluded that “prevention could only prevent a certain amount of disease; people still needed a place to go when they were acutely ill.” So, with the ELCT, he developed one of the clinics into Selian Lutheran Hospital, which now provides care in orthopedics, fistula, hospice and other areas.

Then he and his team opened the Arusha Lutheran Medical Centre, creating training programs for medical officers and nurses and opening a rehabilitation center for children recovering from surgery. Mark said he's proud of the work he and his colleagues have done together and loves seeing his colleagues' skillful leadership of the medical center since he stepped down from his leadership role there.

After working briefly in one of the clinics and then in hospital labs, Linda focused on coordinating volunteers, offering hospitality and arranging housing for visiting medical students and interns. But her most substantial accomplishment may be the support group Widow's Might, launched to counter Tanzania's practice of disinheriting widows. When a Tanzanian woman's husband dies, their property goes not to her but to her in-laws. Not every widow's in-laws claim the inheritance, but Evelyn (last name withheld) and her children stood to lose their house. “I'm not going to fight my family,” Linda remembers her saying. “I'm just going to work. God will help me.” Together, Evelyn and Linda launched Widow's Might, whose members support their families by weaving, sewing, embroidering and beading.

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Remembering her life in Tanzania, Linda is most struck by her neighbors' faith. “If things get really bad [here], we pray,” she said. “My neighbors start by asking us what God wants to do. ... [I] am learning from this tremendous faith.”

▶ To learn more about the Jacobsons, visit [ELCA.org/SOFIA](https://www.elca.org/SOFIA) for a link to the video documentary *Kuambatana (Accompaniment): The Ministry of Mark and Linda Jacobson*.

